

3.20. The *Vidin Miscellany*: translated hagiography in Slavonic (LS)

An intricate complex of circumstances influences the shape that an edition of a mediaeval text will take. However, of all formative factors *tradition* is probably the most important. Obviously, the state of the particular *textual tradition* dealt with will determine both the editorial process and the nature of the edition, but the *scholarly tradition* within which an editor works—or against which s/he chooses to react—is a significant determinant as well. The case of palaeoslavistics is interesting in this respect. The majority of (Old) Church Slavonic texts handed down to us consists of translations of Byzantine-Greek religious writings. Perhaps contrary to expectations, this situation has not resulted in heightened attention to genealogical approaches to text editing that take the Greek tradition into account. Ever since the early days of the discipline Slavists have shown more interest in manuscripts than in texts (as remarked for example by Panzer 1991 and Grünberg 1996, 6–8). The amount of documentary (facsimile or diplomatic) editions of single manuscripts or manuscript texts far outnumbers that of critical editions based on all available text witnesses, and the relation to the Greek source text material has often been left unexplored. Manuscripts have often been approached more as witnesses to a particular linguistic system or to a particular culture of writing than as text witnesses and the distinction between manuscript and text—both termed *pamjatnik* or ‘monument’—has not always been sharply felt (Veder 1999, 5–13). Today, no scholar would deny the importance of the study of extant texts as linguistic structures and of manuscripts as socially embedded artefacts; it is not so much the habit of publishing documentary editions that is to be regretted as the fact that the critical research into the genesis, the transmission and the transformation of texts—both within and across linguistic and cultural boundaries—has often been neglected. With few notable exceptions (for example Veder 1999, 5–60 and Ostrowski 2003, xvii–lxxiii, both introductions to critical editions) there is little explicit theorizing and methodological reflection in the field, which lacks firmly established or broadly accepted standards for text editing. (It needs to be stressed, however, that in pre-revolutionary Russia high standard text critical work was done in the field of Biblical studies. Unfortunately, the revolution prematurely halted the development of Slavonic Biblical philology, which obviously affected the direction taken by textual scholarship in general; cf. the survey of early Slavonic Bible Studies in Thomson [F.] 1998, 607–631.)

Editing the Vidin Miscellany

In the early 1970s two editions appeared of the so-called *Vidin Miscellany*, a codex kept in the Ghent University Library (Belgium) as *Codex gandavensis slavicus* 408. The manuscript contains sixteen translated vitae—interestingly all of female saints—together with a short topography of Jerusalem (see Sels – Stern 2012, 355–361); the text collection has been examined in considerable detail in the (hitherto unpublished) PhD thesis by the Bulgarian scholar Maya Petrova (2003). Although the colophon states that the book was commissioned by Anna, tsaritsa of the Bulgarian principality of Vidin in the year 6868 (1359/1360), recent palaeographical and codicological research has shown that the manuscript is not Anna’s book, but a fifteenth-century copy (Petrova 2001). However, early research into the *Vidin Miscellany* was based mostly on an interest in the codex, perceived as the result of a royal commission and the product of a fourteenth-century scriptorium. Typically, the editions—a facsimile published in the *Variorum Reprints* series (*Bdinski zbornik* 1972) and an annotated transcription by Scharpé and Vyncke (*Bdinski zbornik* 1973)—represented the *Vidin Miscellany* more as a document than as a text. It is clear, however, that the 1973 editors aspired to do more than that, as they added a critical-interpretive layer to their transcription, on the one hand by introducing critical notes and occasional emendations to the text, and on the other by enhancing it with modern punctuation, capital letters, expanded abbreviations, paragraphs etc. However, by doing so they blurred the lines between the documentary and the interpretive level. The diplomatic rendering refers to the *Vidin Miscellany* as a material text, whereas emendations on the basis of Greek source text material refer to the editors’ understanding of the undocumented moment of translation. The erroneous idea that the *Vidin Miscellany* vitae were translated, compiled and copied within the same time frame—namely around 1360, for Anna of Vidin—has contributed to the use of ‘Vidin Miscellany’ as an umbrella term in which the codex coincides without complication with the text collection, and the text collection with the sum of the individual vitae.

Many challenges remain to be met by future editors of the Ghent codex and its texts (Sels 2013) and it is to be recommended that they (1) distinguish more sharply between *the document and the text*; (2) make

a clear distinction between the *collection as a text* and the *collection as a collection of texts*; (3) give full weight to the critical research into the origins and the transmission of the individual entries, taking into account their specific nature as translated, non-authorial texts that are part of complex multilingual traditions, to arrive at a better understanding of the *Vidin Miscellany* as a whole.

The Vidin Miscellany as a document

A text has a textual tradition, a document does not (although, as an object and a material text, it has a history). A document has materiality, a text as an abstraction extrapolated from its various attestations does not. The label ‘Vidin Miscellany’ refers to a document to the extent that it applies to the codex kept in Ghent, which, as a whole of lexical and bibliographic codes, is a meaning-bearing object. It is a text in its material embodiment, written in a dark-brown ink on fourteenth/fifteenth-century paper, bound in 31 *octavo* quires of 13 × 20 cm; it has particular palaeographic and iconic properties, such as its sloppy, slightly angular late South-Slavonic semiuncial script or its decorative system of neo-Byzantine initials (Petrova 2001, 117–120). Any edition of the *Vidin Miscellany* as a document would be as much about the reconstruction of a mediaeval reading environment as about the establishment of a text, hence the precedence of formal-physical aspects such as rubrics, lines and folia over divisions of intellectual content such as sentences, paragraphs or chapters.

The Vidin Miscellany as a text

The title ‘Vidin Miscellany’ also refers to a hagiographic collection compiled at the request of Anna of Vidin. As a text in its own right, the collection has a textual tradition, even if it is limited and largely undocumented: We know that the Ghent manuscript is a copy of Anna’s book, but no other manuscripts are known to contain the same set of vitae.

An edition of the *Vidin Miscellany* as a text, based on the *Vidin Miscellany* as a text witness, would start from exactly the same material evidence but the approach would be markedly different: The editor would want to focus on those aspects of the text that can be transmitted from one copy to another, to arrive at an understanding of the collection as it was conceived around 1360, with its particular linguistic, semantic and literary features. This could imply a decision to substitute the *syntagmata* of the manuscript with sentences and a foliated view with running text divided into paragraphs. However, as the Ghent codex is a *codex unicus* from the point of view of the collection as a whole, the editor would have little other option but to publish the text as it stands, with preservation of its orthography, correcting only obvious scribal errors.

Contrary to what the 1973 editors believed, the Vidin collection was not translated directly from a Greek collection. Its compiler selected existing Slavonic vitae of a particular type of female sanctity and arranged them according to a purposefully chosen organizing principle, adapting some of the vitae to meet the requirements of the collection (as, for example, the *Story of Mary, the niece of Abraham* (ff. 1r–17v), where the narrative of a female ascetic’s lapse into sin and her return to the straight path was isolated from the vita

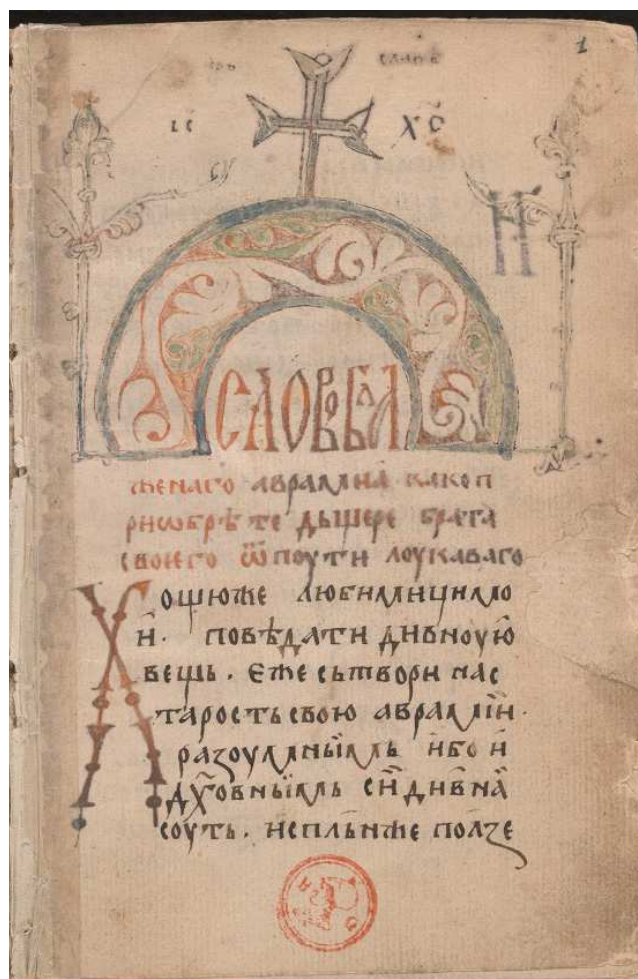


Fig. 3.3.20.1 Ghent University Library, slav. 408, fifteenth century, f. 1r: beginning of the *Life of Abraham of Qidun and his niece Mary*.

of her pious uncle). Helmut Keipert was certainly right to criticize the 1973 edition for its neglect of the textual tradition of the individual vitae and to advocate a collation of the variant texts, the establishment of ‘eine Art Normalversion’ for each vita and a comparison with the Greek source texts (Keipert 1975, 283–284). However, an important distinction must be made: Whereas, indeed, insight into the origins and the transmission of each vita would enable a better understanding of the texts and of the principles underlying their selection and adaptation, it would be methodologically flawed to use this material—the individual variant texts or their Greek source texts—for the *constitutio textus* of the Vidin collection. This would imply reaching back too far and blurring the distinction between the collection as a text and the texts attested to in the collection—which the 1973 editors frequently did.

The Vidin Miscellany as a collection of texts

The *Vidin Miscellany* can also be approached as a collection of texts, namely of individual hagiographies with their own, typically complex multilingual traditions. From that point of view, the Ghent codex is a text witness—one of many—for each of its entries.

The already mentioned *Story of Mary*, for instance, is exemplary for both the wealth of these hagiographic traditions and for the intricacies involved in the search for their origins and textual dynamics. Mary’s story is actually the second part of the *Life of Abraham of Qidun* (BHO 16–17; BHG 5–7), a text originally written in Syriac, probably in the fifth century, and erroneously ascribed to Ephrem the Syrian (Capron 2013, 53–123). The *Life* was translated into Latin and Greek around the sixth century and it appeared in Slavonic as part of an anthology of Ephrem’s works as early as the tenth century, some four centuries before a truncated version would be included in the *Vidin Miscellany*. The Slavonic translation of the *Life of Abraham* has been shown to be much closer to the Syriac and to Greek papyrus fragments kept in the Louvre than to the other Greek witnesses of the *Life* (Hemmerdinger-Iliadou 1965, 302), and, indeed, the printed versions (i.e. the text published in the *Acta Sanctorum* for March and that in Assemani’s edition of Ephrem’s works) are markedly different. A comparison of the Slavonic text with the Louvre Papyrus (ed. Capron 2013, 70–105; 64, note 99) confirms that the Slavonic depends on an archaic, no longer fully attested layer within the Greek tradition. A critical edition that takes both traditions into account is called for. Some forty text witnesses of the Slavonic *Life of Abraham* have been identified so far and the tradition has begun to be studied in some detail (Stern 2013). As is often the case, the broad distribution of the text throughout *Slavia orthodoxa* has brought linguistic proliferation and the co-existence, within one tradition, of an Eastern Slavonic (Russian) and a Southern Slavonic (Bulgarian and Serbian) branch. As can be seen from the example below—which is a normalized, interlinear collation of eighteen text witnesses, the upper part Southern Slavonic, the lower part Eastern Slavonic—the two branches develop along the lines of their own internal dynamics, departing from a point where they still coincided. That point is embodied by the witnesses that represent the earliest documented stage of the text, that is manuscript Athos, Hilandar, 397 (*Codex Chilandaricus* 397) for the Southern and the *Uspenskij sbornik* (Moscow, Gosudarstvennyj istoričeskij muzej, Syn. 1063/4) for the Eastern branch. The clear and easily identifiable directionality of textual change as seen in the example might be surprising as hagiographical traditions are notoriously open and fluid. However, only part of the tradition is represented in the illustration, which does not show the contaminated witnesses that blur the picture of the *Life*’s textual transmission. The text included in the *Vidin Miscellany*, for instance, is of a mixed nature, as orthographically speaking it belongs to the Southern group, while its content combines features of both, although in most of its readings it is closer to the eastern group.

For many hagiographic texts researchers disagree on the number of independent translations reflected in the attested material and indeed, there is nothing exceptional in hagiography about rewritings and re-translations that do or do not integrate material from older versions, which is why, in editorial practice, recourse is often had to parallel editions or hagiographic dossiers (cf., for example, Hinterberger 2014). However, some caution is warranted as an isolated comparison of two extant texts may give rise to the idea that they represent two independent translations, while a closer look into the broader tradition might reveal immediately that they occupy extreme positions in the stemma but ultimately go back to one translation. Some of the questions concerning independent translations or redactions will only be solved in the course of the historical-critical investigation of the sources and the corpus of material to be used for an edition may well be redefined in the course of that process.

The fact that a textual tradition allows for the reconstruction of the archetype, as in the case of the *Life of Abraham*, does not automatically mean that that is how the edition should be shaped. An editor oriented more towards the dynamics of the tradition may still consider a synoptic or an interlinear presentation of various extant text versions. A reconstructed, eclectic non-manuscript text, however, necessarily implies orthographical normalization. Because the Abraham text was translated in the early period of Old Church Slavonic, a reconstruction of the ‘earliest retrievable text’ can be rendered in ‘standard OCS’, i.e. according to the standard laid out by the Slovník of Prague (Kurz – Hauptová 1958–1997). However, normalization remains a huge stumbling block for any editor of later Church Slavonic writings, as there are no standards against which to normalise these texts. The presence of various linguistic recensions within textual traditions further complicates matters, especially when it is unclear which recension has more ancestral rights. The want of a norm for orthographical normalization is one of the reasons why editions of Church Slavonic texts keep being made on the basis of manuscript texts (for example Sels 2009, 104–105).

The Vidin Miscellany as a collection of translated texts

As already shown, the *Vidin Miscellany* should not itself be approached as a translation but as a collection of translated texts. If a mediaeval translation’s quality as translation is to be given its full weight, an editor will need to go into the source text tradition in some depth. However, the question is how far one can go in exploring the multilingual tangle of these hagiographies. The feasibility of an integral approach strongly depends on the availability of scholarly editions and specialized studies on the source text tradition under scrutiny. In the case of the *Life of Abraham of Qidun*, no critical edition is available, although the work of the French scholar Laurent Capron has recently shed light on the Greek tradition (Capron 2013, 53–123). Too often, editors of Slavonic texts have juxtaposed their transcriptions to readily available print versions of Greek texts in the *Patrologia Graeca* or the *Acta Sanctorum*, or to self-made patchwork versions made up out of bits and pieces of particular Greek witnesses to perfectly match the Slavonic (as was done for the text on St Thais in Voordeckers 1964). While, on the ideal level there is a source text and its translation, on the level of the material evidence there is only a number of extant texts, Greek and Slavonic, that cannot be meaningfully related without insight into the nature of the translation model and the particulars of the original translation. To gain that insight is a process that oddly works in two directions, i.e. from a general idea of the Greek source text to that of a particular (but mostly non-extant) source text version that marks the point in the Greek tradition from where the Slavonic tradition took off, and from the extant Slavonic text witnesses to a general idea of what the original translation might have looked like. This is typically done by comparing the Slavonic translation (which we only know through its extant copies) to the Greek variant readings to learn about the nature of the source text, and by comparing that Greek source text to the Slavonic variant readings to come to a better understanding of the original translation. Clearly, some circularity cannot be avoided. However, what theoretically looks like aporia is in actual practice feasible as a process of repeated comparison in two directions.

The nature of the translation relationship is of consequence as well. Extremely literal translations, such as those typical of the fourteenth century (Sels 2009, 52–55), will facilitate not only the identification of relevant Greek variants but also of secondary readings in the Slavonic tradition, while a free translation may leave the editor in doubt with regard to the nature of the Greek exemplar and the place of the translation within the Greek stemma. It should be kept in mind, however, that a reliable assessment of the translation relationship can be made only through the philological work described above; misguided judgments have arisen as the result of comparing a Slavonic translation with a wrong version of the Greek source text or comparing a Greek source text with a Slavonic manuscript text that has evolved away from the text as it was originally translated (cf., for example, the juxtaposition of the *Vidin Miscellany*’s *Story of Mary* and the Greek Abraham text as published in the *Acta Sanctorum* by De Beul et al. (1965), with countless brackets to indicate non-correspondence). It is the editor’s responsibility to link the Greek source text material meaningfully to the Slavonic text as it is established in the edition, which is ideally done by means of a special section in the introduction and a Greek-Slavonic parallel presentation of the text itself. If a critical edition of the Greek is available the critical text of the Greek can be juxtaposed to the Slavonic with indication of the particular Greek variants that have shaped the Slavonic tradition, for instance in a special apparatus (as in Sels 2009). In the absence of a critical edition of the Greek the editor

Greek	καὶ	πατάξας	αὐτοῦς	ἐπέστρεψεν	Λῶτ	τὸν ἀνεψιὸν	αὐτοῦ.
Alpha	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	лота	сыновн	своего.
Ch397	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	лота	сыновн	своего
Ch384	и	побѣднѣз	ѣа	възврати	лота		сыновн
Nbkm298	и	побѣднѣз	ѣа	възврати	лота		сыновнѣца
Berlin	и	побѣднѣз	ѣа	възврати	лота		сыновнѣца
Rila	и	побѣднѣз	иѣз	възврати	лота	сына брата	своего
Ch648	и	побѣднѣз	иѣз	възврати	лота	сына брата	своего
Nbkm299	и	побѣднѣз	иѣз	възврати	лота	сына брата	своего
Kop	и	побѣднѣз	иѣз	възврати	лота	сына брата	своего
Usp	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	лота	сыновѣ	своего
BOZ99	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възвратиѣз	лота	сыновн	своего
VMC	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	лота	сыновнѣца	своего
MGU	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	лота	сыновнѣца	своего
TrS	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	люди	сыновнѣца	своего
V1199	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	люди	сыновнѣца	своего
Sar60	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	люди и	сыновнѣца	своего
Sar61	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	люди и	сыновнѣца	своего
GIM332	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	люди и	сыновнѣца	своего
Sar1115	и	попыравъ	ѣа	възврати	люди и	сыновнѣца	своего

Fig. 3.3.20.2 Normalized interlinear collation of eighteen text witnesses to the Slavonic *Life of Abraham of Qidun and his niece Mary* (screenshot from a collation demo developed by David Birnbaum and Lara Sels).

may want to consider representing the Greek source text on the basis of the manuscript text(s) that best parallels the Slavonic translation, with indication of instances where other Greek witnesses offer a better match.

An editor needs to make clear statements about the nature of the text s/he is about to edit, even if the reality of the text is not always as clear-cut as presented here. Everyone agrees that palaeography belongs to the document and literariness to the text, but language is already much harder to pinpoint (on the idea of the extant text as a linguistic compromise between the scribe's own linguistic usage and the language of his model, see Segre 1976, 283–285). A colophon usually belongs to a document, but the one in the Ghent codex does not properly belong to it—it was copied and thus acquired a tradition. Once the boundaries are clearly drawn an editor can safely let information gained from one perspective spill over in research that takes another point of view, i.e. to have the document explain part of the history of the text and to have the history of the text explain some of the particulars of the document. Even if it is true that a document is self-sufficient and used independently from its sources, an awareness of the textual and linguistic layers that make up the fabric of its text remains of pivotal importance. Retracing the origins and the life of a text through textual criticism is not necessarily about textual idealism or essentialism; it is about understanding extant texts. In the case of hagiographical texts, editors should not be discouraged by the *a priori* assumption of textual fluidity from exploring the textual traditions as fully as possible, even if the establishment of an archetypal text is not always possible and not always desirable. No single way of publishing and presenting a text is incompatible with critical research into its textual history, both within and beyond linguistic boundaries.

NB For the use of the terms ‘recension’ and ‘redaction’, see Schenker (1995, 200): ‘Texts sharing features introduced spontaneously and unconsciously (for instance, dialectal characteristics) represent a particular recension (Russian *izvod*). Texts sharing features introduced intentionally and consciously (for instance, ideological tendencies) constitute a redaction (Russian *redakcija*). In other words, a recension refers specifically to the linguistic properties of a text, while a redaction is defined primarily by its cultural context’.

References

Bdinski zbornik 1972; *Bdinski zbornik* 1973 = Scharpé – Vyncke 1973; Capron 2013; De Beul et al. 1965; Grünberg 1996; Hemmerdinger-Iliadou 1965; Hinterberger 2014; Keipert 1975; Kurz – Hauptová 1958–1997; Ostrowski 2003; Panzer 1991; Petrova 2001, 2003; Schenker 1995; Segre 1976; Sels 2009, 2013; Sels – Stern 2012; Stern 2013; Thomson [F.] 1998; Veder 1999; Voordeckers 1964.